

Opening the Word: God gives us the freedom: Which path will we choose?



From an early age, we come to recognize ourselves as free creatures. The 2-year-old seeks to tie her own shoes, to buckle her own seatbelt, to “do it myself!” This awakening of freedom is a perilous gift. After all, we have been made to act with freedom. We are born with a will. And through this will, we seek to express ourselves in the world.

But the freedom to express oneself can be used in harmful ways. The criminal maliciously may employ a similar freedom that the artist uses to compose a symphony. Because we have been given freedom, we must employ it responsibly. The great task of a human person is to learn to be free.

God’s salvation of men and women in the Scriptures does not erase this freedom. God’s call capacitates us to use this freedom rightly, as a gift to be returned unto God. In the Book of 1 Kings, God – through Elijah – calls Elisha. Yet Elisha does not immediately respond to this call. He is wary. He asks to return to his family, to kiss his mother and father goodbye.

[13th Sunday of Ordinary Time – June 30, 2019](#)

1 KGS 19:16, 19-21
PS 16:1-2, 5, 7-8, 9-10, 11
GAL 5:1, 13-18
LK 9:51-62

Elisha seeks to control God’s word. He will respond to the divine call but on his own terms.

Elijah speaks God’s word to Elisha: This is not an option.

God's call necessitates an immediate response – a gift of your whole self back to God. Elisha does just this. He burns the plow. He slaughters his oxen. He leaves behind his previous life, giving every dimension of his being over to God.

Our Lord Jesus Christ takes the position of Elijah in the Gospel of Luke. He encounters prospective disciples, and they want to follow him. But they're not entirely ready. They want to bury their father. They want to say goodbye to a friend. They're not ready to give themselves entirely over to the call of the kingdom of God.

Jesus underlines what Christian freedom is: that radical answer to God's call, a gift of the whole self back to the Father. Christian freedom comes with no constraints. It means total, radical abandonment of logic and total, radical commitment to the kingdom of God.

St. Paul takes up this perilous call to freedom. The Galatians have been set free from the constraints of the Law. Their freedom is linked to their commitment and to following the law of love unto the end. So, they can't just do whatever they would like. They can't just eat meat from idols. They can't just break the Law because they have been set free in Christ.

Freedom in Christ means a more faithful adherence to that law. It means radical love of neighbor. It means radical service through love. It means complete and absolute abandonment to God.

Who can do this? We know the perils of human freedom from experience. Every time we advance and move closer to the kingdom, we're also tempted to hold back. Our will is pulled in different directions. We know the good; we may even will ourselves to do the good. But sometimes we don't.

The Good News is that, as Christians, our natural freedom has been supplemented. The Spirit of God has descended upon us, transfiguring our freedom.

The Spirit of God has come upon us to form us in the art of self-giving love. The Spirit of God is that which breathes in us, enabling us to pray, do good works and to give ourselves over to the kingdom of God. So freedom is perilous. It's dangerous. But, it's also how God will save the human family.

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